

Communication from Public

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Comments for Public Posting: Please see the article entitled "What's Going on At the West Valley Animal Shelter—Will It Remain a City-Run Shelter?" in CityWatch: <https://citywatchla.com/index.php/cw/los-angeles/20457-what-s-going-on-at-the-west-valley-animal-shelter-will-it-remain-a-city-run-shelter> The article details objections stakeholders have to the Draft Proposal dated June 26, 2020, submitted by Los Angeles Animal Services Department (LAAS), for the West Valley Animal Shelter. The vast majority of Valley residents oppose the de-municipalization of the Shelter (i.e., turning the Shelter over to a rescue organization). Five Neighborhood Councils have submitted Community Impact Statements opposing the LAAS Proposal. The Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (VANC), representing all 34 Neighborhood Councils in the San Fernando Valley, voted unanimously to oppose the LAAS Proposal, and to "demand[] that the West Valley Shelter remain open as a municipal shelter ..." This is all discussed in the CityWatch article noted above; a copy of the article is also attached. Sincerely, Jeffrey Mausner (For identification purposes: Neighborhood Council and VANC Liaison to Los Angeles Animal Services Department; Board of Directors and 2nd Vice President, Tarzana Neighborhood Council; Chairman, Tarzana Neighborhood Council Animal Welfare Committee; Neighborhood Council Budget Representative; Volunteer, West Valley Animal Shelter; Email: Jeff@MausnerLaw.com; J.Mausner@TarzanaNC.org)

<https://citywatchla.com/index.php/cw/los-angeles/20457-what-s-going-on-at-the-west-valley-animal-shelter-will-it-remain-a-city-run-shelter>



What's Going on At the West Valley Animal Shelter—Will It Remain a City-Run Shelter?

Jeffrey Mausner
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PERSPECTIVE--The City of Los Angeles is in dire financial condition. It was in bad condition before Covid 19; things have gotten worse since the pandemic.

All of the departments in the City are facing budget cuts. But will those budget cuts fall disproportionately on the people and animals of the San Fernando Valley?

The Current Status of the City Animal Shelters: When the pandemic hit, all six of the City Animal Shelters (West Valley, East Valley, West L.A., North Central, South/Chesterfield Square, and Harbor) were closed to the public. West Valley and North Central were completely closed; there are no animals or employees in them. The other four shelters continued to operate, with animals present and regular employees working. Volunteers were not allowed in any of the shelters; they are now allowed to perform limited functions outside the buildings. Members of the public can receive services in the parking lots at the four working shelters by appointment. Animal Care Technicians (ACTs) and Vets/Vet Techs care for the reduced number of animals in the four working shelters. In the absence of Volunteers being able to enter the buildings, ACTs perform enrichment and exercise activities with the animals on a limited basis, to the extent possible.

At the closed West Valley Shelter, a sign on the front door says:

CALL 1-888-452-7381 IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE

Have an animal emergency?

If you have an emergency with a sick or injured animal, call 1-888-452-7381 to find the nearest shelter. Let us know you are arriving and describe the emergency. We will get all the information we need and will be able to meet you in the parking lot of the nearest shelter that is open if no appointment is available.

Found a lost pet?

Can you help get that pet home? Post a photo and description of the found pet on LACityLost and Found Pets, Nextdoor, Pawboost, or Shadowapp and hang flyers in your neighborhood to help reunite the pet with his or her family.

Or consider our Shelter-at-Home program and we'll get the pet's picture on our website, too. Visit LAAnimalServices.com and click "Policies" in our main menu, and the "Shelter at Home" for more information.

If you cannot temporarily keep the pet, call 1-888-452-7381 and make an appointment to bring that pet to the closest Animal Services Center to you.

DO NOT abandon and leave your pet outside the Center. Pet abandonment is a violation of CA Penal Code 597.

The Problem: The budget for Los Angeles Animal Services Department (LAAS) is being cut by \$3,946,927. (Fiscal Year 2019-2020 budget allocation was \$27,156,069 – less than one half of one percent of the City budget. This year's budget allocation is \$23,209,142. This is a 14.5% budget cut. These figures do not

include pension and benefit costs and other expenses that are separately funded in the City budget.) LAAS has determined that this will result in a reduction of personnel that makes it difficult for LAAS to operate all six City animal shelters.

The LAAS Draft Proposal: In order to deal with this budget cut, LAAS has written a draft proposal to turn the West Valley Animal Shelter, located at 20655 Plummer Street in Chatsworth, into a “Community Resource Center” which would be used by rescue organizations to house animals and provide certain limited services to the community. Under the current draft proposal, residents of the West Valley would not be able to bring stray animals or animals to be surrendered to the “Community Resource Center,” adopt animals from there, or have Animal Control Officers dispatched from there to deal with animal issues in the West Valley. That would all have to be done at the East Valley Shelter in Van Nuys, which is already normally (pre-Covid) at or over capacity. In addition, with the loss of the sheltering capacity of the West Valley Shelter, there would not be enough kennel space and other resources to deal with all of the stray, surrendered, and abused animals in the Valley, raising the possibility of animals having to be killed in the City shelters for lack of space. The Valley would be losing close to half of its animal resources; the West Valley would be losing almost all of its animal resources, hardly an equitable result.

Neighborhood Council members have noted that the West Valley Shelter was paid for by Measure F bonds, which are paid for by the taxpayers of the City, and their property should not be given to a rescue organization. The San Fernando Valley constitutes approximately 40% of the total geographic area of the City of Los Angeles and has a population of approximately 1.77 million. One animal shelter is not sufficient for such a large geographic area and population. The Valley was supposed to have 3 animal shelters; one was already given to a rescue organization, and if this proposed plan is carried out, the Valley will be left with only one animal shelter, even though the citizens of the Valley (and the rest of the City) have paid for three.

Meetings Regarding the Proposal: There have been several Zoom meetings regarding this Proposal. City Councilman Bob Blumenfield was the scheduled speaker at the Tarzana Neighborhood Council meeting on July 28, so many people (including at least two current Animal Control Officers) called in with comments and questions regarding the West Valley Shelter Proposal. Councilman Blumenfield appreciated the comments and spoke extensively in response. On August 10, there were two meetings with LAAS Management and Shelter Volunteers. More than 30 Volunteers and the entire LAAS Management (including the General Manager and Assistant GM) participated in the meetings. (I

participated in both meetings.) On August 10, 11, and 12, meetings were held with LAAS leadership and members of the Community. (I participated in the meetings on August 10 and 11.) LAAS leadership was open to input from Volunteers and the Community during these meetings.

Issues That Have Been Raised: *The overwhelming majority of people who have expressed a view on it much prefer that the West Valley Shelter remain a municipal shelter and operate the way it did prior to Covid. Over 8,000 people have already signed a petition against de-municipalizing the West Valley Shelter.* Those opposing the Draft Proposal support additional funding for LAAS to be able to operate West Valley as a municipal shelter; raising funds from charitable organizations and individuals, to supplement what cannot be provided from the General Fund and other budget sources; giving Shelter Volunteers additional responsibility so that the current and projected number of regular employees can operate all six shelters. LAAS' response to this last suggestion is that the MOU (memorandum of understanding) with the unions prohibit non-union persons from performing jobs that union employees do. However, I think this may not apply to Volunteers performing additional work, especially during and after a pandemic, and that the unions may not object to Volunteers performing additional work if that could help to keep the West Valley Shelter open. All the regular employees I have spoken with want West Valley to remain open, and in the current situation Volunteers would not be displacing any regular employees. To the contrary, keeping West Valley open will secure the jobs of regular employees; their jobs are more secure with 6 shelters than with 5 shelters.

There has also been the suggestion that rather than having the entire budget cut fall on the West Valley Shelter and most municipal functions being shut down at that one shelter, that all six City Shelters should share in this burden. For example, a percentage of kennels (possibly 10 to 15% of kennels) at all six shelters could be turned over to rescues, rather than turning over 100% of the kennels at just one shelter, West Valley. This has been referred to by LAAS as a "share the pain" plan.

People have expressed the view that the City and LAAS have not done enough to explore ways that the West Valley Shelter can remain a fully functioning municipal shelter. Many people believe that the City and LAAS have immediately rushed to dump the Shelter onto rescue organizations and the Community to deal with, even though West Valley residents pay taxes to have a municipal animal shelter. There is a lot of anger regarding this.

I have put together a summary of the issues that have been raised at the meetings which have taken place so far, as well as from calls and emails I have gotten and my own comments, as follows:

1. Response time will increase for Animal Control Officers (ACOs) at East Valley to respond to emergencies in the West Valley. Response to incidents involving dangerous animals, wildlife, injured animals, strays, and other services ACOs provide, will be delayed. Will the number of ACOs at East Valley be increased to fully account for the loss of ACOs at West Valley? Will ACOs continue to be stationed at West Valley? This issue has been raised by several ACOs as well as community members.
2. As the Proposal is currently written, West Valley residents will not be able to turn in strays or surrender animals (intakes), redeem, foster, adopt, and get other services from the West Valley Shelter, and will have to go to East Valley. West Valley residents will be losing a valuable resource which they have paid for.
3. The East Valley Shelter does not have enough capacity to handle all the stray, surrendered, abandoned, and abused animals in the Valley. Animals will either be left on the street or killed. Losing the West Valley Shelter will set back No-Kill, an important policy of the City. The capacity of citizens to foster dogs and cats, in order to make up for this loss of kennel space, will be depleted, especially as people go back to work as the Covid safer at home requirements are eased.

The West Valley Shelter has about 90 general population cat cages; East Valley only has about 30. In 2019, 10,201 cats and kittens were taken in at these two shelters. The East Valley Shelter will be unable to handle anywhere near this volume of incoming cats. The West Valley shelter has about 152 dog kennels; East Valley shelter has about 165. In 2019, the intake of dogs at West Valley was 3,276; East Valley intake was 5,450, for a total of 8,726 dogs coming into the East and West Valley Shelters. LAAS has not explained how it can house such a large intake of dogs without the West Valley Shelter.

4. There is a health hazard for the West Valley because of more stray animals on the streets, including a health hazard for the homeless population.
5. West Valley is the only City shelter that takes large animals – horses, goats, sheep, etc. Where will those animals go?
6. West Valley takes in animals in emergencies, like fires and earthquakes. West Valley is closest to fire areas; where will those animals go?

7. West Valley takes overflow from other shelters when they are overcrowded and West Valley has room.
8. West Valley has air conditioning for the dog kennels while East Valley does not. The two exercise yards at West Valley have artificial turf, while the one at East Valley does not. Volunteers can walk dogs around the block at West Valley, while they cannot do so at East Valley because it is in a residential neighborhood. The dog kennels at West Valley have two sections separated by the “guillotine door,” while East Valley does not, making it harder to get some dogs out of the kennels at East Valley. West Valley is a better facility. Why give away the better shelter? If all West Valley Volunteers start going to East Valley, there will be nowhere for the larger number of Volunteers to take dogs since there is only one play yard and the dogs cannot be walked around the block at East Valley.

LAAS takes the position that because East Valley has misters for the dogs, it is not any hotter than West Valley. That simply is not correct. The misters at East Valley are not as effective as the air conditioning at West Valley. Furthermore, some dogs do not like the misters and try to stay out of the mist. There has been a great deal of concern expressed for the dogs this summer, with temperatures reaching 115 degrees at the East Valley Shelter in Van Nuys, while the West Valley Shelter with air conditioning remained closed.

9. Assuming there is no alternative to de-municipalizing the West Valley Shelter, if rescue organizations are running the West Valley Shelter, there must be direct community oversight.
10. If rescue organizations have facilities at the West Valley Shelter, will LAAS Volunteers be able to put in volunteer time caring for and walking the rescue animals that are housed there?
11. There should be community input into determining which rescues will get facilities at taxpayer paid for shelters. Rescues that have had disagreements with LAAS cannot be automatically excluded.
12. West Valley hoarder cases, abuse cases, barking dogs, administrative citations, and other animal matters have to be dealt with.
13. Classes are taught at the West Valley Shelter through the LAUSD Regional Occupational Program (ROP), for West Valley students. These classes are taught by West Valley Animal Care Technicians (ACTs) with West Valley Shelter animals. These classes should continue at the West Valley Shelter.

14. As noted above, serious consideration should be given to expanding the role of LAAS Volunteers, so as many municipal functions as possible can be maintained at the City animal shelters.

Neighborhood Council Opposition to the LAAS Draft Proposal

On August 25, 2020, the Tarzana Neighborhood Council passed the following resolution:

Whereas the Los Angeles Animal Services (LAAS) Department's draft Proposal dated June 26, 2020 to turn the West Valley Animal Shelter into a privately run Community Resource Center would result in significant loss of City services for the people and animals of the West San Fernando Valley; and

Whereas it would result in overburdening the only other city animal shelter in the Valley, the East Valley Animal Shelter; and

Whereas it would be inequitable because the entire burden of the LAAS budget cut is being visited on one area of the City, the West Valley; and is overwhelmingly opposed by the residents of the West Valley and the City; and

Whereas there are alternatives to the draft Proposal that would maintain the West Valley Shelter as a fully functioning municipal shelter.

Now Therefore, the Tarzana Neighborhood Council opposes the LAAS draft Proposal for the West Valley Animal Shelter dated June 26, 2020.

On September 2, Los Angeles City Councilmember John Lee introduced a resolution, seconded by City Councilmember Bob Blumenfield, which states:

In November 2000, Los Angeles voters overwhelmingly approved Measure F which provided nearly \$533 million in bond funding for a major upgrade of the City's fire stations and animal shelters. Over the course of the ensuing years, almost all of that funding has been expended on projects to modernize and expand the City's fire and animal care facilities. This General Obligation Bond provided the necessary \$154 million in financing for the construction and/or rehabilitation of 8 animal shelters, most notably the West Valley Animal Shelter.

In response to the City's current financial situation, due to the impacts of COVID-19, our City departments have had to make temporary changes to their operating budgets and that includes the Department of Animal

Services. However, it has come to the Council's attention that the once temporary plan to shutter City operations at the West Valley Animal Shelter, due to COVID-19, could now become permanent. With both valley shelters covering a geographic expanse that constitutes 40% of the total area of Los Angeles, with an estimated 1.77 million population, it is imperative that the City maintain its operations at the West Valley Animal Shelter. In 2019, the West Valley shelter impounded a total of 9,320 animals, while the East Valley shelter impounded 14,605. The City would be negligent in their obligation to provide necessary services to all stray or lost animals if the West Valley shelter no longer operates as a city shelter and the burden to accommodate and care for an estimated 24,000 animals is left to only the East Valley shelter.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Department of Animal Services be instructed to report immediately to this council on the long-term plan for the West Valley Animal Shelter.

As well as Tarzana, a number of other Neighborhood Councils have passed motions and/or filed Community [Impact Statements](#) in support of this resolution: Northridge East NC, President Glenn Bailey and Ken Ross, ("The Northridge East Neighborhood Council vehemently demands that Los Angeles City reopen the West Valley Animal Shelter permanently funded at least as before and that it not be given away to a non-profit organization.")

[Porter Ranch NC.](#)

Other Neighborhood Councils will be filing additional Community Impact Statements. In addition, many City residents have [filed comments](#) opposing the draft plan. See Additional comments can be submitted to the City Council [here](#):

On September 10, the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils (VANC, President Jill Banks Barad), representing all 34 Neighborhood Councils in the San Fernando Valley, passed a resolution very similar to the Tarzana NC resolution quoted above. VANC added the following to that resolution: VANC "demands that the West Valley Shelter remain open as a municipal shelter, and urges Neighborhood Councils to file Community Impact Statements (CIS) in support of this position in City Council File 20-1114, entitled West Valley Animal Shelter Long Term Plan."

The purpose of all this is to let the Animal Services Department, City Council, and Mayor Garcetti know that the current plan for the West Valley Shelter is unacceptable and they should work to come up with a more acceptable plan that deals with the objections that have been raised. There has been talk at LAAS that a

“share the pain” among the shelters plan for dealing with the budget cuts will not work. However, picking another shelter to turn over to rescue organizations will not be acceptable. The Neighborhood Councils and citizens of Los Angeles will not accept that. Instead, think about implementing some of the proposals set forth above. The people and animals of the City deserve that.

In closing, it should be noted that opposing turning over a City Animal Shelter to rescue organizations should not be viewed as in any way critical of rescue organizations. Rescues and the people who run and volunteer for them are among the most kind, generous, dedicated, and effective entities, and persons for helping animals. However, they operate in conjunction with the City sheltering system, and their efforts should not be a substitute or excuse for doing away with City services that the citizens have paid for.

([Jeffrey Mausner](#) is the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils Liaison to the Los Angeles Animal Services Department, 2nd Vice President of the Tarzana Neighborhood Council and Chair of its Animal Welfare Committee, and a Volunteer at the West Valley Animal Shelter. He was previously a Neighborhood Council Budget Advocate and is now a Budget Representative. He is a retired attorney and law school professor and was formerly a Federal Prosecutor for the U.S. Justice Department.)